



File Code: 1950/2720

Date: December 11, 2014

Dear Interested Citizen:

The Forest Service is currently evaluating a special use application from Atlantic Coast Pipeline, LLC to conduct field routing, environmental, cultural resource, and civil surveys on National Forest System (NFS) lands within the George Washington National Forest (GWNF). These surveys would occur along a 12.6 mile segment of their proposed pipeline that would cross the GWNF in Highland and Augusta counties, Virginia (see enclosed map).

At this time, we are seeking comments specifically related to the survey activities identified in their application to decide whether to issue a permit for these activities. Additional information may be found at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/gwj/landmanagement/projects>, under the "Atlantic Coast Pipeline" project.

BACKGROUND

Atlantic Coast Pipeline, LLC is a joint venture comprised of subsidiaries of Dominion Resources, Duke Energy, Piedmont Natural Gas, and AGL Resources that is proposing to construct and operate approximately 551 miles of a natural gas pipeline referred to as the Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP). Dominion Transmission, Inc. (Dominion) is the contractor who would build and operate the ACP on behalf of the joint venture. This interstate pipeline would deliver natural gas from supply areas in West Virginia to Virginia and North Carolina.

Atlantic Coast Pipeline, LLC has pre-filed (Docket #PF15-6) with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) under Section 7(c) of the Natural Gas Act. FERC will be the lead agency and will conduct an in-depth environmental analysis, with many opportunities for public comment, prior to deciding on the need for the pipeline. If FERC would determine the pipeline is needed, the Forest Service would make a separate determination whether to issue a right-of-way permit to construct, operate and maintain a natural gas pipeline on the GWNF.

PROPOSED ACTION

Dominion is seeking a 12-month planning permit under the U.S. Forest Service's Special Use Authorization regulations (36 CFR Part 251, Subpart B) for the purpose of conducting activities such as field routing, environmental, cultural resource, and civil surveys along a 300-foot-wide survey corridor within a 2,000-foot-wide study corridor where the planned pipeline route crosses the GWNF. The surveys would be conducted by Dominion and its consultants Natural Resource Group, LLC and GAI Consultants, Inc.

The 2,000-foot-wide study corridor comprises approximately 3,055 acres of NFS lands. Under the 2014 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the GWNF, the study corridor occurs primarily within the Management Area 13-Mosaics of Habitat (95%) with



smaller areas of 7B-Scenic Corridors (4%) and 7E2-Dispersed Recreation Areas (1%). The Forest Plan allows the survey activities identified below to occur within these management areas.

Routing Survey – This would be a pedestrian reconnaissance survey to address engineering requirements, provide a route that can be safely constructed, and/or avoid sensitive resources within the 2,000-foot-wide study corridor. Minor amounts of brush using hand tools could be removed for navigation of route. GPS readings, biodegradable survey ribbon and survey stakes (to be removed after all of the surveys) would be used to identify the centerline by the other survey crews.

Environmental Survey – This would include a wetland and waterbody delineation survey using visual observations of vegetation composition, hydrology and soil samples at selected locations within 300 feet of the routed centerline. GPS readings and ribbon would mark wetland perimeters and high water marks of waterbodies. Identification of potential suitable habitat for sensitive species, including federally listed threatened and endangered species, would be recorded with GPS readings. Invasive plant species would also be documented. No flora or fauna would be collected.

Cultural Resources Survey – This would be a pedestrian reconnaissance and shovel testing survey using field methodology, data recording and documentation in accordance with all state and federal guidelines for Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act compliance within 300 feet of the routed centerline.

Civil Survey – This would be a recording of GPS readings of the centerline and other features along the route within 300 feet of the routed centerline. Minor amounts of brush could be removed with hand tools to provide line of sight and a travel path for survey equipment. Brush cutting would be limited to saplings or limbs less than 2 inches in diameter. PK nails, biodegradable flagging and plastic pin flags would be used as needed.

Access for the Surveys – No vehicles would be used except to access the corridor using public and existing Forest Roads. The surveys would be conducted on foot.

NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

These surveys are collectively necessary to determine the feasibility of the proposed route and collect the environmental and cultural resources data needed to make future decisions on whether or not to allow the construction and operation of the proposed gas pipeline on the GWNF. If construction is allowed, the survey information will also inform us where to avoid or reduce the impacts to sensitive resources on the GWNF.

DECISION TO BE MADE

The Forest Supervisor is the responsible official who will decide whether to issue a temporary, (one year or less) special use permit to allow the identified survey activities to occur within the identified study and survey corridors on National Forest System lands within the GWNF.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

We welcome your comments on this temporary (one year or less) use of NFS lands on the GWNF to conduct these surveys. Allowing these survey activities does not mean that we are allowing the construction of a pipeline across the GWNF. FERC is the lead agency who will prepare the environmental analysis for the construction and operation of the ACP and will provide additional opportunities to comment in the coming months. We are currently preparing a categorical exclusion (CE) for the environmental analysis for the permit, in accordance with regulations 36 CFR 220.6(e)(8), subject to public involvement and the determination that no extraordinary circumstances exist for these survey activities.

Please provide your comments by January 9, 2015. There are several options for providing comments. Hand-delivered comments must be received within our normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Comments may be faxed to our office at 540-265-5145. Comments may also be mailed to our office. When sending comments through the postal system please use the following address:

USDA Forest Service
George Washington and Jefferson National Forests
ATTN: Atlantic Coast Pipeline Survey Comments
5162 Valleypointe Parkway
Roanoke, VA 24019

Comments may also be mailed electronically to our office at: comments-southern-georgewashington-jefferson@fs.fed.us. When sending electronic comments, please note the name of the project in the subject line of the electronic mailing [i.e. Atlantic Coast Pipeline Survey Comments].

More information, including maps and specifics of survey activities can be found on our website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/gwj> or by calling (540) 265-5100.

Sincerely,



H. THOMAS SPEAKS, JR.
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure



Atlantic Coast Pipeline Project

George Washington National Forest

- Study Corridor
- George Washington National Forest
- Sheet Index
- State Boundary
- Counties Crossed



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